

The Date Palm Tree

The date palm tree is a genre of long-living trees that is characterized by its massive height and is an evergreen tree. It grows in a number of countries, mainly Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, Bahrain, Gulf states, Arab Maghreb, the Levant and other countries.

The date palm tree was bestowed with appreciation and referral in ancient times, and was adored by all religions. Mention was made to it lavishly in Torah, Talmud and the Bible. It was expressly brought up in the Quran in 21 verses and was referred in Sunna in more than 300 Hadiths. Every part of the tree has a great value, the fruit, fibres, trunk, fronds and leaves. The fruits in particular are rich in various nutritional constituents needed by man such as water, minerals, salts, vitamins and sugars, among others.

The origin of the date palm tree is a subject of controversy. Many believe it has first appeared in Arabian Gulf region, while others argue that it originally belongs in other semi-arid areas. The presence of an-Nakhla in Sudan goes back to a time before 400 BC, since Karma civilization between 2500 BC and 1500 BC. It symbolized life and development and was engraved on the walls of burial vaults and temples and on clay vessels.

The date palm tree in Sudan is intimately related to the rites of lifecycle from birth to death, being involved in the rituals, practices and social festivals. This tangible presence is embraced by the subsequent religions up to Islam. It was also associated with practices and knowledge related to nature and the universe, especially in the knowledge related to its cultivation and care, from its planting to the reaping of its fruits. Palm parts are used in folk medicine to treat and prevent many diseases, in addition to the traditional craftsmanship skills in which the various parts of the tree are used as raw materials to produce a number of tools that people use in their daily life, such as leaves, fronds, fibres, and stems.

The date palm's is a major subject of oral traditions and expressions such as popular literature, poetry, proverbs, wisdom quotes, riddles, praises, and songs, is very strong. It is used to impart knowledge, cultural, social and collective memory values and it plays a

very important role in maintaining the viability and continuity of culture. The cultural heritage of the date palm is equally connected to performing art. The trunk is hollowed and crafted as musical drums and the musical cultures is rife with songs that glorify the palm tree or borrow some of its aspects and liken them to girls as qualities of beauty and attractiveness.

The date palm is cultivated in different regions of Sudan, the River Nile and the Northern States on the banks of the Nile along the desert area. It is also grown in the regions of North Kurdufān, North Darfur and some parts of the Red Sea. During the last ten years, Khartoum State is beginning to grow several varieties date palm in large-area plantations.

The palm tree is important to many tribal groups, including the Nubian groups Ḥalfāwiyyīn, Maḥas, Sakkūt, Kunūz and Danāqla, in addition to the Arabic groups Bidairīyya, Rubāṭāb, Manāṣīr, Shāyqīyya and Ja'aliyyīn. There are also the residents of the banks of the Nile River in the northern desert, and the landowners who cater for date palms on their inherited lands, or planted the tree recently in their own farms. The concerned groups also include farmers who rent lands populated with palm trees, and those who cultivate and care for the trees and reap their fruits at harvest time, and the artisans who benefit from the fronds and leaves in their traditional handicraft industries such as brooch, woven frond mats, tray covers and others. It is worth noting that most of the artisans are women who are proficient in making their necessary household requirements and benefit from this craft as an additional source of income by selling it in the markets or to merchants who in turn sell them in cities. Among the concerned groups are the local population in the agricultural areas, whether they are men, women or children who contribute to the safety, trimming and land clearing of the palm-cultivated lands and who carry out the harvesting task of the ripe dates against payments in cash or in kind. All this made the palm tree an element related to all aspects of the intangible cultural heritage of the aforementioned groups. their link with this element extends to include oral traditions and expressions, practices, rituals, ceremonies, performing arts and other social practices.

The knowledge and skills associated with date palm cultivation, watering, pollination, knowledge of different types of date fruits, pest control, harvesting, and other relevant knowledge and skills are transferred through informal education. This knowledge is transferred from fathers to their sons through indoctrination and simulation because it is related to people's lives and their livelihood. Everything related to the crafts is taught by mothers to girls, and women learn among themselves how to make some traditional crafts

to pass the time or even to benefit from what they produce in their homes or offer them for sale. Recently, a number of societies interested in traditional crafts have been active in conducting educational workshops to teach the crafts using as raw material different parts of the palm tree.

All parts of the palm tree are used as raw materials for the production of many objects that are used for different purposes in daily life, such as the branches of the palm tree which are used to produce *Burūsh*, sing. *Birish* (palm frond mats), utensils and various household items such as: the *Quffa* (basket), *Ṭabaq* (tray cover), *‘umra* (woven frond container) and *Mu’lāq* (sling container). The stem and strip are used in traditional architecture to build the roofs of houses, and to build bridges on streams, and is also used as fuel in bread ovens. The palm fiber is used to make ropes with which to weave beds and seats such as *‘anāqrīb*, sing. *‘anqaraib* (wooden beds) and *Banābir*, sing. *Banbar* (low-bed seats), and in many other objects needed in agriculture and for other purposes. Images of the tree or parts of it also appear as part of the traditional designs used to ornament houses of the concerned communities. The fruits, dates are major ingredients in a variety of traditional foods, drinks and therapeutic and preventive medicines.

The practices, skills and other cultural aspects of this element are constantly recreated by the concerned communities in response to the environment and their interaction with nature and their history and fostering their sense of identity and continuity, and strengthening their creative abilities.

A number of groups and communities in different geographical regions of Sudan consider the palm tree as part of their culture and heritage. Such common recognition of the same element encourages dialogue between these groups and allows for their proximity and intercommunication. It also reflects the benign side of cultural diversity and ignites the spirit of creativity among them.

This cultural heritage may be supported by means of documentation, research and by raising the awareness of its importance through the prudent employment of audiovisual and printed information material. In this respect TV and radio programs may exhibit the unique characteristics of the palm tree heritage and highlight its role as a major expression of the Sudanese cultural identity.

There were a number of ongoing initiatives that help in the continuity of this element, like dates and date palm festival which was organized for the tenth time by the Sudanese Society for the Maintenance and Cultivation of Date Palm Tree. The last such event that took place in Karima on the first of December 2017, Town won the international prize for the date palm and agricultural creativity of the United Arab Emirates. The exhibit hosts participating groups from different geographical locations that are concerned with the date palm heritage, the centres, associations, organizations and agricultural companies involved cultivation of date palm, and the factories which produce food products and drinks from dates. All of these entities exhibit their cultural heritage that relates to the palm tree and prizes are presented to the winners in the best exhibit completion. In the last version of this fair, a special issue of the Blessed Tree Magazine was dedicated to Sudan and to all the palm tree heritage. A considerable number of studies was published in this issue covering the subjects of heritage, history, cultivation and diseases associated with the date palm tree.

Lately, the State has adopted a project for the documentation of the Nakhla heritage. The project focuses on highlighting the importance of this element's heritage in asserting the Sudanese sociocultural identity. It also casts light on the role this cultural element may play in economic, social and cultural development. In response to the threats manifest in globalization and the changes resulting from technological advancements, that jeopardize the continuity of date palm continuity, the project is collecting and documenting this heritage to align its practical use with the contemporary cultural conditions. Realizing the importance of this project and benchmarking the experience of other countries in utilizing the modern techniques to enable this element take its rightful place in development, the State is in the process of allocating the budget required for its implementation.